

Appraisal of Knowledge and Attitude of Akwa Ibomites toward a Sustainable Environment in Nigeria

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Developing countries are constantly and continuously confronted with a myriad of health and environmental problems that threaten the efforts to establish and maintain safe air and water supplies. Nigeria, in general, and Akwa Ibom State, in particular, are not isolated from increasing health and sanitation problems. My goal in this study was to determine the knowledge base of men and women related to sanitation and environmental health in Akwa Ibom State. I found no differences in the attitudes of men and women toward the sustainability of health or a healthy environment in the state. However, more sanitation and environmental education is needed as part of long-term strategy for abating sanitation and environmental health problems in this state. *Environ Health Perspect* 110:211–212 (2002). [Online 5 February 2002] <http://ehpnet1.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2002/110p211-212ebong/abstract.html>

Environmental conditions in many areas threaten to reverse the gains made in public health over the last several decades (1). Every human should have a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. In a tragically degraded environment, human health is threatened. Most cities of the world are faced with problems of growth. In Nigeria, environmental pollution is an important challenge to public health as a result of urbanization.

Babalola (2) lamented over the declining environmental sanitation in Nigeria and appealed to all Nigerians to be involved in maintaining good sanitation. Poor sanitation and unhygienic behaviors led to the launching of the “war against indiscipline” by Major General Tunde Idiagbon, who said that slums and ghettos were the incubators of epidemic diseases that pose a serious danger to human health.

Developing countries face increasingly serious environmental problems that threaten efforts to improve the standard of living and worsen health conditions. In cities, increased congestion, industrial expansion, and lack of pollution control result in unhealthy levels of pollutants in air and water. Environmental stress is the price of development; in fact, widespread environmental damage is likely to hinder developmental efforts and worsen the plight of people living in acute poverty (3).

The relationship of humans to the environment is reciprocal in that the environment has profound influence on humans and, at the same time, humans extensively alter the environment to suit their needs and desires. Some of these changes have proved beneficial, but some aspects of these changes have created new hazards. The humans’ attitudes toward the environment are still negative and are often contrary to the concept of sustainable

development, which recognizes that economic growth and environmental protection are inextricably linked and that the quality of present and future life rests on meeting basic human needs without destroying the environment on which all life depends (4). Despite various programs by different tiers of government to address the issue of environmental sanitation, many Nigerians still have negative attitudes toward environmental sanitation and do not value personal or environmental sanitation (5). Because of these attitudes, it was necessary to assess the people’s knowledge of benefits of a healthy environment. Ukpong (1) emphasized the importance of education in achieving the goals in environmental sanitation. He stressed strategies such as analysis, sensitization, information, education, and motivation, and indicated that these strategies would provide knowledge and would change the people’s attitudes toward environmental sanitation.

The Problem

In recent decades there has been a widespread concern about sustainability of the environment and all of its ramifications. The global concern about sustainability arose as a result of increasing environmental degradation. The concern about pollution and deterioration of environmental quality has been building momentum to various environmental movements (6). Despite the various organizations that are now spearheading political activism and campaigns for changes in policies, laws, technologies, and development strategies to enhance environmental health qualities, the achievement is minimal. Because of this lack of achievement, I decided to assess the knowledge and attitudes of the people toward environmental sanitation and a sustainable healthful environment.

Initiating a Sustainable Environment in Nigeria

Environmental degradation and unsanitary conditions have affected Nigeria in recent years, especially in urban areas. The increasing concern for poor sanitation and possible sustainability of a safe environment has attracted the attention of individuals, organizations, and the government. Based on this, I designed an assessment to appraise the knowledge levels and attitudes of the residents of Uyo Local Government Area on maintaining a sustainable healthful environment.

The results of this assessment revealed that male and female residents are not significantly knowledgeable about activities for maintaining a sustainable healthful environment. The Ministry of Health (7) reported that in a predominantly illiterate society, one of the best methods to popularize an idea is by mass mobilization of the public conscience. In Nigeria, the mass media have promoted environmental sanitation; public enlightenment campaigns are also valuable in promoting sanitation. Education on sanitation is geared toward the sustainability of a healthful environment. According to Peters (4), the Nigerian government has responded to the environmental sanitation program, but the people have little knowledge about activities that can foster a healthy environment.

I used oral interviews to assess the attitudes of members of the Uyo Community to determine if male and female attitudes about sustainability of a healthful environment differ significantly. The assessment revealed that attitudes do not differ between males and females, but are negative toward activities for the sustainability of a healthful environment. Attitude has major influence on people’s achievement in a particular program. People tend to have a positive attitude as their knowledge level increases; thus, lack of knowledge affects attitude, acceptance, and achievement of any set of goals (8). The World Health Organization (9) has stressed that the hygienic disposal of waste is one of

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the most serious environmental problems in many regions of Africa. The negative attitudes of the people toward involvement in environmental sanitation programs in many developing countries is detrimental. Instead of emphasizing laws, environmental education should be intensified by adopting a community environmental education approach that uses intergroup relationships, value patterns, and communication resources in the specific social system.

Conclusion

My assessment revealed that the Uyo residents knew little about activities toward a sustainable healthful environment. The residents also have negative attitudes toward involvement in activities that promote a sustainable healthful environment. Education

will help in the development of positive attitudes toward environmental sanitation activities.

My recommendations for improving sanitation are as follows:

- Governments should develop strategies to educate people on the importance of environmental sanitation and sustainability
- Efforts should be made to organize seminars for health workers to effectively educate the general population on programs for a sustainable healthful environment
- The government should establish environmental health policies to reduce environmental degradation and pollution
- The government should develop programs and provide facilities so that garbage and waste can safely be removed from homes and streets.

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